



## Cash Crops of Cane River



**Cotton**



**Tobacco**



**Indigo**

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### Cotton

The cotton plant is a shrub native to tropical and subtropical regions throughout the world and has been cultivated for centuries. Cotton was not the first cash crop for the planters on Cane River, but it was the most profitable. Large scale cotton production did not become profitable throughout the South until the invention of the cotton engine or gin, patented by Eli Whitney in 1793. “King Cotton” exploded as land and slaves fueled each other in the antebellum South. Locally, large cotton plantations included Oakland, owned by Emmanuel Prud’homme and Magnolia owned by Ambrose LeComte. The Prud’hommes continued to have good cotton yields well after the Civil War. Their cotton won gold medals at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 and the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904. While still a valuable cash crop on Cane River, corn and soy beans have emerged as strong competitors.

### Tobacco

Tobacco is processed from the leaves of plants in the genus *Nicotiana*. Native Americans had a long history of tobacco use by the time the European settlers arrived. Locally, tobacco was one of the first cash crops in the region. Under Spanish rule, plantations along the Cane River grew tobacco for the Spanish Bourbons to sell in Europe where it was highly prized and very favorable; poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow refers to “...sweet Natchitoches tobacco...” in his poem *Evangeline*. Soil depletion, crop failures and the invention of the cotton gin led to sugar and cotton replacing tobacco as the cash crop of choice in much of the Deep South.

### Indigo

Indigo dye is among the oldest coloring used by humanity; the pigment was used in textile coloring, cosmetics, printing, and for medicinal purposes. Part of the processing of indigo included mixing it with various other substances to produce different shades of blue and purple. Along with tobacco, indigo was an early cash crop along Cane River. Under Spanish rule, the region’s indigo crop was sent to Europe to be used in military uniforms. Natural indigo dye became obsolete in 1897 with the introduction of synthetic indigo dye.